SEXUAL ORIENTATION-BASED VICTIMIZATION AND INTERNALIZED HOMONEGATIVITY AMONG LATINX SEXUAL MINORITY YOUTH: EXPLORING THE MODERATING EFFECT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SCHOOL LEVEL

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Zhenqiang Zhao

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As members of the Master's Committee, we certify that we have read the thesis prepared by *Zhenqiang Zhao*, titled Sexual Orientation-Based Victimization and Internalized Homonegativity among Latinx Sexual Minority Youth: Exploring the Moderating Effect of Social Support and School Level and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Master's Degree.

Russell B Toomey

Russell B. Toomey — Date: Dec 16, 2019

Katharine Hunsdon Zeiders
Katharine Hunsdon Zeiders (Dec 16, 2019)

Katharine H. Zeiders — Date: Dec 16, 2019

Melissa Y. Delgado — Date: Dec 16, 2019

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the thesis to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this thesis prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the Master's requirement.

Russell B Toomey

Russell B. Toomey — Date: Dec 16, 2019
Master's Thesis Committee Chair
Family Studies and Human Development

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

Latinx sexual minority youth (SMY) experience sexual orientation-based victimization at school and may internalize these homophobic experiences. At the same time, the minority stress model posits sexual minority individuals may benefit from social support. Thus, the current study explored associations between sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity across social contexts (family, peer, and school adult) and across development (high school versus college) among 233 Latinx SMY. Results showed that sexual orientation-based victimization was positively associated with internalized homonegativity among Latinx SMY. Such associations were moderated by perceived family support and the school level in the family context such that in high school, perceived family support exacerbated associations between sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity, but in college, it mitigated that association. Similarly, findings also showed perceived peer support exacerbated the associations between sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity. There was no moderating effect of perceived school adult support in the associations between sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity. These findings contribute empirical evidence regarding the minority stress model among Latinx SMY and highlighted the potential complex effect of social support across social contexts and development.

Introduction

Sexual minority youth (SMY) are more likely to experience school victimization compared to their heterosexual peers, which in turn has detrimental impacts on their development such as psychological well-being, externalizing, and internalizing problems (Darwith, Hymel, & Waterhous, 2012; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010; Troop-Gordon, 2017). Sexual orientation-based victimization, a specific type of victimization that SMY encounter because of their sexual orientation, is usually expressed as verbal (e.g., call unwanted names), physical (e.g., push or kick), or psychological (e.g., be ignored by others) harassment or assault attributed to one's actual or perceived sexual orientation. According to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Educational Network's (GLSEN) 2017 National School Climate Survey, a majority of SMY experience school victimization because of their sexual minority status (Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, & Truong, 2018). For example, the report showed that 95.8% of sexual minority students heard homophobic remarks, such as "dyke" or "faggot," and 59.6% of sexual minority students experienced either unwanted physical touch or sexual remarks at school. Alarmingly, rates may be higher among Latinx SMY as they encounter additional biases in relation to intersections of multiple marginalized identities (Toomey, Huynh, Jones, Lee, & Revels-Macalinao, 2017); however, despite increasing needs of exploring intersections of sexual orientation and race-ethnicity, very little research has focused on this population. The Latinx population is the largest and youngest ethnic minority group in the U.S. (Colby & Ortman, 2015), and it is critical to study sexual orientation-based victimization among Latinx SMY.

According to the minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), homophobic experiences contribute to disparate mental health-related problems among SMY. Much of the research on experiences of sexual orientation-related victimization has focused on mental health outcomes,

such as depression or self-esteem (Hatchel et al., 2018; Pachankis, Sullivan, Feinstein, & Newcomb, 2018), and limited studies have examined how these sexual minority-specific stressors are internalized and further influence their life (e.g., internalized homonegativity; Burks et al., 2018). Burk and her colleagues (2018) found that sexual orientation-based victimization is associated with another source of stressors among SMY, internalized homonegativity, which refers to the negative self-evaluation about their sexual orientation (Walch, Ngamake, Bovornusvakool, & Walker, 2016). Moreover, many existing studies have focused on the experience of a predominantly White population with a wide age ranges (Puckett, Newcomb, Garofalo, & Mustanski, 2016; Walch et al., 2016).

Fewer empirical studies have examined variability in the experience of sexual orientation-based school victimization among SMY, which may help to explain why the impact of sexual orientation-based victimization varies across different sexual minority populations. According to the minority stress theory, the association between sexual orientation-based victimization and poor mental health is attenuated when the youth receive social support (Meyer, 2003), which is conceptualized as psychological resources from multiple social interactions (e.g., family, peer, teacher) that benefits sexual minority individuals (Williams, Frey, Stage, & Cerel, 2018). Further, the impact of each type of social support may differ based on the social environment in which SMY are situated (Taylor, Doane, Eisenberg, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the variations in the association of sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity among Latinx SMY in terms of moderation of social support and school level. This information is critical in helping to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies to promote positive experience among Latinx SMY in schools.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation

SMY, as a highly stigmatized minority group, experience unique stressors because of their sexual minority status (Meyer, 2003, 2010) in addition to the general stressors that heterosexual (e.g., straight) youth face at school. To differentiate the impact of stressful events from social environments and structures (e.g., discrimination toward sexual minority population) with personal social experiences (e.g., internalized homonegativity) among sexual minority individuals, the minority stress model proposes a distal-proximal distinction among factors that can influence health outcomes (see Figure 1). A distal stressor refers to heteronormative and prejudice thoughts, values, and events in the social environment with which a sexual minority individual interacts, whereas a proximal stressor refers to the subjective thoughts, values, and beliefs originated from personal social experiences (Meyer, 2003).

To explain distal and proximal stressors further, sexual minority individuals living in a heteronormative environment experience victimization because their sexual minority status violates heteronormativity (Toomey et al., 2016). Victimization is one of the common distal stressors stemming from social inequity and existing independently from perceptions of individuals, which means, no matter whether sexual minority individuals conform to heteronormativity or not, they are at risk for sexual orientation-based victimization (Meyer, 2003; Toomey, 2016). At the same time, when sexual minority individuals experience sexual orientation-based victimization, SMY may accept these heteronormative attitudes and thoughts, and develop a negative self-concept such as internalized homonegativity (one of the representative proximal stressors; Burks et al., 2018). These distal and proximal stressors adversely impact SMY (Meyer, 2003).

Nonetheless, sexual minority individuals including sexual minority people of color, are afforded with protective resources that counteract and mitigate the impact of stressors on mental health outcomes. Protective resources, such as social support, provide stigmatized persons a supportive relational context where they can reappraise stressors to be less detrimental to psychological well-being (Meyer, 2003, 2010). Yet, research about protective resources has largely focused on its moderating role between stressors and health-related outcomes among sexual minority individuals, which fails to distinguish distal and proximal stressors as each of them may interact differently with the protective factors (Button, O'Connell, & Gealt, 2012; Craig & Smith, 2014). As displayed in Figure 2, there could be three different moderating mechanisms of protective factors. First, moderation could happen between distal stressors and protective factors which ultimately have an impact on proximal stressors. Second, moderation could happen between distal stressors and protective factors and could have a direct impact on mental health. Third, moderation also could happen between proximal stressors and protective factors and contribute to mental health. As a result, even though both the theory and empirical studies have supported the role of promotive factors, it remains unclear whether interactions occur in the distal, proximal, or both environments. The current study sought to examine the first type of moderation in particular: whether social support moderates the association between distal stressors and proximal stressors.

Sexual Orientation-Based Victimization at School

Sexual orientation-based victimization refers to the verbal, physical, psychological, or sexual remarks, harassment, discrimination, and assault toward sexual minority populations based on their sexual minority status (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). Even though people are increasingly aware and accepting of sexual diversity, and acknowledge that sexual minority

people do not need to conform to the mainstream heteronormative culture (Johnson, 2015), there remain expectations for what is considered normal behavior, appearance, or value for sexual minority people. Violating these heteronormative societal standards puts sexual minority individual at risk for victimization (Konik & Cortina, 2008). Victimization can also come from misunderstandings and misconceptions about sexual minority population (Morrison, Kiss, Bishop, & Morrison, 2018). Therefore, sexual minority individuals are still exposed to social environments where they can experience sexual orientation-based victimization.

Previous research has found that sexual minority youth are at higher risk than adults to be victimized by anti-gay attitudes and behaviors (Meyer, 2003). School is a unique social environment where youth spend a considerable amount of time with their peers and where most socialization happen among youths (Theimann, 2016). As sex-related issues intensify during adolescence under the heteronormative social environment, youths are also becoming more aware of differences in sexual orientation (Troop-Gordon, 2017). As a result, SMY may face more challenges and stress at school compared to sexual minority adults (Barnett, Molock, Nieves-Lugo, & Zea, 2018; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; Meyer, 2003). For example, in a national survey of more than 23,000 sexual and gender minority youth between the ages of 13 and 21, researchers found that more than half of sexual minority students heard homophobic remarks either from their peers or school adults, almost 90% of sexual minority students were harassed at school, and over two-thirds of sexual minority students reported that they experienced anti-gay discrimination at school (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2018).

Sexual Orientation-Based Victimization and Internalized Homonegativity

Theories and empirical studies consistently emphasize the adverse impacts of sexual orientation-based victimization among SMY (Hatchel et al., 2018; Katz-Wise, & Hyde, 2012;

Meyer, 2003, 2010). One of the consequences of sexual orientation-based victimization is internalized homonegativity, which refers to the status of self-stigmatization that sexual minority people accept anti-gay attitudes and behaviors toward sexual minority population and try to deny their sexual identity (Walch et al., 2016). According to the minority stress model, sexual orientation-based victimization contributes to sexual minority youths' internalization of homophobic attitudes toward sexual minority populations and devaluate their sexual identity, and such internalized homonegativity influences SMY over the lifespan (Meyer, 2003).

Empirical evidence suggests that experiencing sexual orientation-based victimization impacts sexual minority individuals via increased internalized homonegativity (Burks et al., 2018; Puckett, Maroney, Levitt, & Horne, 2016; Walch et al., 2016). A longitudinal study of 450 young adult gays demonstrated that participants who experienced sexual orientation-based victimization reported an increase in internalized homonegativity six months later (Puckett, et al., 2016). However, despite the importance of sexual orientation-based victimization on the self-identification among SMY, only a few studies have focused explicitly on the youth population (Meyer, 2003). Notably, no previous studies have examined whether sexual orientation-based victimization predicts internalized homonegativity among Latinx youths. Therefore, there is an increasing need to understand the experience of sexual orientation-based victimization, as well as the contributions of such victimization among Latinx sexual minority youths in the school setting.

Sexual Orientation-Based Victimization and Social Support

One of the primary protective resources that has been empirically examined within the sexual minority research is social support (Espelage et al., 2018; Price, Hill, Liang, & Perella, 2019; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2004; Ybarra, Mitchell, Palmer, & Reisner, 2015). In

the school context, youth potentially receive psychological support from their parents, peers, and school adults (e.g., teacher, school administrator; Darwich et al., 2012). Although no studies have examined whether social support mitigates the adverse effect of sexual orientation-based victimization on internalized homonegativity among SMY, prior studies regarding different type of minority identity supported the buffering effect of social support (e.g., ethnic minority identity; Raffaelli, et al, 2013; Wright, & Wach, 2019). For example, in a longitudinal study about Latinx adolescents, Wright and Wach (2019) found that social support from family, friends, and teachers weakened the adverse impact of racial discrimination on relational aggression. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that social support may similarly buffer the association between sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity. For example, in a study of heterosexual and SMY, researchers found that social support buffered the adverse contribution of victimization on psychological distress (Steers et al., 2018).

However, there are ongoing debates about how social support influences sexual minority youth who were victimized due to their sexual orientation. One of the reasons is the inconsistent hypothesized models with respect to social support. On the one hand, researchers hypothesize that social support interacts with victimization to explain variation in outcomes (e.g., Craig, & Smith, 2014). On the other hand, social support is believed to have a direct impact on outcomes among SMY (e.g., Hall, 2018). Yet, among studies considering social support as a moderator, it remains unclear how social support interacts with stressors to have an impact on outcomes.

Moreover, although researchers have found similar patterns in the effect of each type of social support, such as family support, peer support, school adult support (Button, O'Connell, & Gealt, 2012; Hall, 2018), no studies have compared the effectiveness of specific source of social support. For example, in a large sample study with over 600 SMY, results indicated that support

from school adults mitigated the association of sexual orientation-based victimization with school avoidance among bisexual and questioning male youths (Darwich et al., 2012). However, in another study of 255 sexual minority youths, only family support was associated with school performance (Craig, & Smith, 2014). It is also unclear whether the amount of resources (e.g., Button et al., 2012) or level of each type of social support (e.g., Brandon-Friedman & Kim, 2016) matters when it interacts with victimization. Given that relationships with people in different social contexts (e.g., family, school) vary (e.g., Craig & Smith, 2014; Darwich et al., 2012), the current study sought to explore the moderating effect of perceived social support within each social relationship including family, peer, and school adults.

Specifically, the current study sought to examine the impact of social support to the sexual minority community, which represents a group-level resource instead of one targeting each individual. A supportive environment allows stigmatized people, such as sexual minority people, to experience an environment where they are not stigmatized anymore and to feel strong affiliation with people, which can reduce stressors that they encounter (Jones et al., 1984). Similarly, when SMY perceive their social networks as supportive, they are less likely to internalize sexual orientation-based victimizations, which then may reduce internalized homonegativity.

Potential Variability by Development and Culture

An important consideration when understanding the links between victimization, internalized homonegativity, and social support is the academic context (e.g., high school and college). From a developmental perspective, distinct developmental milestones occur in the transition from adolescence corresponding with the ages of high school students to young adulthood corresponding with the ages of college students (Aquilino, 2006). During high school,

youths are developing a sense of self by exploring different identities (Erickson, 1968). In college, identity development may be achieved but still can be influenced by new experiences. Related, sexual orientation is one of the key identities that develop during this adolescence (D'Augellli, 1994). Given that the minority stress theory suggests that internalized homonegativity decreases as sexual minority people age (Meyer, 2003), youths' internalized homonegativity may be differentially impacted by sexual orientation-based victimization across school levels. That is, sexual orientation-based victimization may be particularly harmful in high school as compared to in college, as sexual minority high school students are in the process of exploring their identities including sexual orientation (Erickson, 1968), and may be more sensitive to victimization that is specifically related to sexual orientation.

As for support, developmental considerations are also relevant. School environments change during the transition from high school to college (Taylor, Doane, Eisenberg, 2014). For example, compared to high school students who spend the majority of time with the same group of peers and teachers every day, college students have more autonomy in class enrollment, peer selection, etc., which may contribute to the difficulty in building intimate relationships with peers and school adults. Further, young adults gain more autonomy and become independent within social relationships (Peter, Toomey, Heinze, & Horn, 2014). The lack of intimacy and increased independence in the relationship indicates they are less likely to be influenced by others' attitudes and may result in the decreased impact of social support mitigating the impact of sexual orientation-based victimization on internalized homonegativity.

However, in the context of family, such moderating effect of development may not as significant as that in other contexts (e.g., school context in which interactions with peers and school adults happen). Especially among Latinx populations, familism plays an important role in

Latinx culture and is an important resource for acquiring emotional support for Latinx youth (Nicasio, Cassisi, Negy, & Jentsch, 2018). Therefore, the emotional support from family members could be particularly critical for Latinx adolescents and young adults. That is, family support could prevent Latinx SMY from internalizing sexual orientation-based victimization across development. Alternatively, it is also possible, especially for college students who live apart from their family, Latinx SMY could also rely less on emotional support from their family as they are developing more autonomy. Unfortunately, no studies have looked at variations in internalizing sexual orientation-based victimization across social context and across development. Thus, the current study sought to explore the potential moderating effect of development in the interaction between social support and sexual orientation-based victimization.

The Present Study

In summary, previous research has found that sexual orientation-based victimization is related to higher internalized homonegativity in sexual minority youths (Walch et al., 2016), and there is a potential moderating effect of social support and school levels that buffers the negative contribution of homophobic victimization (Craig, & Smith, 2014; Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1994). However, what remains understudied is whether promotive factors may buffer the association between distal and proximal stressors. That is, social support may mitigate the association between sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity and moreover, whether such moderating effect of social support varies across social context including family, peers, and school adults. Further, it is possible that the moderating role of social support differs across development. Finally, few studies have focused on Latinx SMY regarding the relation between victimization and internalized homonegativity, even though this

population might experience this association differently than White populations due to cultural values and norms. Therefore, the current study examined (1) the moderating effect of social support in the association between a distal stressor (sexual orientation-based victimization) and a proximal stressor (internalized homonegativity) among Latinx sexual minority youth in the school context, (2) the moderating effects of each types of social support and (family, peer, school adult support), and (3) school level (e.g., high school and college) may interact with victimization and specific types of support to relate to internalized homonegativity. Based on the previous literature, the current study proposed following hypotheses and research questions. Given the limited theory and insufficient empirical work, the present study made no specific hypotheses regarding the three-way moderating effects of social support and development.

Hypothesis 1: Sexual orientation-based victimization at school is positively related with internalized homonegativity among Latinx SMY such that when Latinx SMY experience more sexual orientation-based victimization at school, they are more likely to internalize homonegativity.

Hypothesis 2: Social support, including family, peer, and school adult support, moderate associations between sexual orientation-based victimization at school and internalized homonegativity among Latinx SMY, such that those associations are weaker among Latinx SMY with higher social support including family, peer, and school adult support, respectively.

Research question 3: Does the moderating effect of social support including family, peer, and school adult support upon associations between sexual orientation-based victimization at school and internalized homonegativity differ from high school to college among Latinx SMY?

Method

Procedures

The present study used a sub-sample retrieved from a larger study that focused on the intersectionality of race-ethnicity and sexual orientation among 382 Latinx sexual and gender minority youth. The data were collected online using social media recruitment via the GLSEN in late 2014 by posting recruitment messages both in English and Spanish on the GLSEN Facebook and Twitter accounts. The survey was available in both English and Spanish, and most of the participants completed the survey in English (71.2%). The original survey was approved by Kent State University's Institutional Review Board and GLSEN's Research Ethics Review Committee.

Sample

Participants who met the following criteria were included in the analytic sample: (1) identified their sexual identity as gay, lesbian, bisexual or being attracted to same-sex; (2) attended school at the time of the study. The final analytic sample for the current study included 233 Latinx sexual minority adolescents and young adults who were enrolled in schools at the time of the survey. Participants in the sample are between the ages of 14 and 24 years (M = 19.03, SD = 2.28) and identified as Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano/a (66.3%) followed by Puerto Rican (20.1%), Cuban (5.4%), and the rest of participants did not indicate their Hispanic origin (6.2%). In terms of gender, most participants were cisgender male (72.5%); 25.4% were cisgender female, and 2.1% were transgender or other non-binary genders. Approximately 63.3% of participants identified themselves as gay, 26.7% were lesbian, 8.8% were bisexual, and 1.2% identified with other non-heterosexual identities (e.g., queer,

pansexual). Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among all study variables.

Measures

Sexual orientation-based victimization at school. Sexual orientation-based victimization at school was measured with an adapted instrument (Toomey, Card, & Casper, 2014), a six-item scale that assesses self-reported sexual minority status-based peer victimization. Participants were given certain situations (e.g., “Other students hit or kick me”) and rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (0 = Never, 3 = Many times) based on how often that situation occurred because people knew or assumed the sexual orientation of the participant. Reliability was strong in this sample (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.91$). Higher scores reflect higher levels of sexual orientation-based school victimization.

Internalized homonegativity. Internalized homonegativity was measured with the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Revised Scale – Internalized Homonegativity Subscale (Mohr & Sarno, 2016), which contains three items (e.g., "If it were possible, I would choose to be straight"). Responses for items were rated on a 6-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree) and demonstrated acceptable reliability in the current study (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.85$). High scores reflect higher levels of internalized homonegativity.

Perceived social support to the sexual minority community. Perceived social support to the sexual minority community was measured with one question asking how supportive people in each social network are to the sexual minority community. Social networks include parents, extended family members, peers, coaches, etc., but the current study applied three major social networks: family, peer, and school adult, which have been considered as most influencing social networks to youth. Participants rated the question (“How supportive you believe the

following people are of LGBTQ people and issues") on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not supportive, 5 = very supportive). Based on the previous studies that examined the moderating effect of different type of social support (Craig, & Smith, 2014; Darwich et al., 2012), the present study used the responses specific to support from family, peers and school adults.

Educational attainment. Participants' self-report of their grade level from 6th grade to Graduate student. Based on the report, we dichotomized into high school and college. Participants who reported "9th grade" to "12th grade" were included in the "high school" group, and those who reported "undergraduate: freshman" to "graduate student" were included in the "college" group.

Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted using the R program (R Core Team, 2018) to address the research questions. A series of regression models were conducted: (a) a model examining the main effect of victimization, (b) a model examining the moderating role of support (2-way interactions) and (c) a model exploring the role of developmental stage (additional 2-way interactions and 3-way interaction between victimization, social support, and developmental stage. Prior to examining interactions, continuous measures were mean-centered (Aiken & West, 1991). Significant interactions were probed at one standard deviation above and below the mean for social support, and simple slopes analyses were examined to decompose significant interactions (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006). Missing data were handled using full information maximum likelihood in lavaan in R (Rosseel, 2012), which assumes a missing at random mechanism. Social economic status (SES) was included in the analyses as the auxiliary variable as SES can significantly predict the missingness in sexual orientation-based victimization (t = 2.95, p = .01; Enders, 2010).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations between all key variables by school level. Among high school Latinx SMY, sexual orientation-based victimization was positively correlated with internalized homonegativity and perceived family support. Peer support was positively correlated with school adult support. Among college Latinx SMY, sexual orientation-based victimization, family support, and school adult support were positively correlated to internalized homonegativity. Family support was positively associated with school adult support. Table 2 displays the mean score of sexual orientation-based victimization at the item level. Participants reported the highest scores in the item: "Other students spread rumors about me." (M = 1.54, SD = .96) and reported the lowest scores in the items: "Other students push me around." (M = 1.30, SD = 1.03) and "Other students try to make their friends ignore me or stop talking to me." (M = 1.30, SD = .97).

Family Support and School Level as the Moderator

Based on the results from the baseline regression of sexual orientation-based victimization, family support, and school level predicting internalized homonegativity (see Table 3), victimization at school (b = .98, p < .001) and school level (college = 1; b = .45, p < .01), but not family support (b = .09, p = .14), were significantly associated with internalized homonegativity. A significant three-way interaction involving victimization, family support, and school level for internalized homonegativity was found (b = – .46, p < .01). After probing the three-way interaction, all of the simple slopes were significant (see Table 4) indicating regardless of family support and school level, there was a positive interaction between sexual orientation-based victimization at school and internalized homonegativity (see Figure 3). In high school,

such associations were stronger among Latinx SMY who perceived higher family support (b = 1.10, $p < .001$) compared to those who perceived lower family support (b = .73, $p < .01$). However, the relation between victimization and internalized homonegativity was opposite for college students. That is, in college, the association was stronger among Latinx SMY who perceived lower family support (b = 1.21, $p < .001$) compared to those who perceived higher family support (b = .78, $p < .01$).

Peer Support and School Level as the Moderator

Based on the results from the baseline regression of sexual orientation-based victimization, peer support, and school level predicting internalized homonegativity (see Table 3), victimization at school (b = 1.07, $p < .001$) and school level (college = 1; b = .50, $p < .001$), but not peer support (b = .01, p = .94), were significantly associated with internalized homonegativity. Results from moderation analysis showed that no significant three-way interaction involving victimization, peer support, and school level for internalized homonegativity was found (see Table 3). Instead, a significant two-way interaction between sexual orientation-based victimization and peer support was found (b = .29, $p < .01$). After probing the two-way interaction, both simple slopes were significant (see Table 4), indicating that regardless of school levels, there was a positive interaction between victimization and internalized homonegativity (see figure 4). Such associations were stronger among Latinx SMY who perceived higher peer support (b = 1.27, $p < .001$) compared to those who perceived lower peer support (b = .84, $p < .001$).

School Adult Support and School Level as the Moderator

Based on the results from the baseline regression of sexual orientation-based victimization, school adult support, and school level predicting internalized homonegativity (see

Table 3), victimization at school (b = 1.07, p < .001) and school level (college = 1; b = .51, p < .001), but not school adult support (b = - .03, p = .68), were significantly associated with internalized homonegativity. Results from regression analysis showed that no significant three-way interaction involving victimization, school adult support, and school level for internalized homonegativity were found (b = .02, p = .89; see Table 3). Without any interaction involved, sexual orientation-based victimization (b = 1.07, p < .001) and school level (college = 1; b = .51, p < .001) were both positively associated with internalized homonegativity.

Discussion

The current study examined relations between sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity with three types of social support and school levels as potential moderators. The main purpose of the study was to address inconsistent findings regarding the moderating effect of social support in the associations of sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity, to explore the potential developmental variations in such moderating effects, and to further build the literature focused on the unique experiences of Latinx SMY populations. Several significant three-way and two-way interactions were found, which highlighted the importance of each type of social support and school level in understanding the variability in the association between school-based victimization and internalized homonegativity. The current study also established an empirical example of the interaction between distal stressors (sexual orientation-based victimization) and protective factors (social support) on proximal stressors (internalized homonegativity). Findings are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Sexual Orientation-Based Victimization and Internalized Homonegativity

The current study found a positive association between sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity among Latinx SMY, which aligns with the first hypothesis. This finding is also consistent with prior studies on the associations between victimization and internalized homonegativity among general SMY populations (Burks et al., 2018; Mohr, & Sarno, 2016; Puckett, Maroney, Levitt, & Horne, 2016; Walch et al., 2016). The finding provides empirical evidence to direct connection between a distal stressor and a proximal stressor, which has implications . The finding also has implications for developing sexual minority identities inclusive school policies to prevent and intervene sexual orientation-based in-school victimizations to ensure positive sexual identity development among Latinx SMY.

Social Support as the Moderator of Sexual Orientation-Based Victimization

The current study also explored whether protective factors interact with distal stressors to influence proximal stressors as the minority stress theory does not distinguish the interaction between different types of stressors and moderators (Meyer, 2003). The findings in the current study largely conflicted with the proposition in the minority stress theory in which social support mitigates the adverse impact of homophobic victimization (Meyer, 2003). Notably, mitigation of victimization depended on the social context and school level of the SMY. That is, family support among Latinx SMY either exacerbated or mitigated the contribution of sexual orientation-based victimization on internalized homonegativity based on the school context; peer support among Latinx SMY only exacerbated such contributions; and school adult support did not interact with sexual orientation-based victimization to predict internalized homonegativity. Variations in the interactions between family support and victimization across school levels are discussed in the next section.

Specifically, the current study found that Latinx SMY who perceived more supportive peer context were more likely to internalize homophobic experience in contrast to Latinx SMY who perceived less supportive peer context. This finding about exacerbating effect of peer support to sexual orientation-based victimization conflicts with the prior research that suggests the protective effect of peer support (Williams et al., 2004; Ybarra et al., 2015). It is possible that even though Latinx SMY perceived their peer context as the most supportive context relative to the two other contexts examined in this study, other social contexts such as family and school adults may be not as supportive as peers or they may even be hostile to the sexual minority community. As a result, the adverse effect of social support perceived from other contexts might have offset the mitigating effect of supportive peer contexts. That is, instead of one specific supportive social context being protective to homophobic experiences of Latinx SMY in school, perceived support from different social contexts may interact with each other to inform the internalization of sexual orientation-based victimization among Latinx SMY. Yet, due to limitations of statistical power, I was unable to examine this potential explanation in the current study. Thus, future studies should examine the holistic contribution of supportive contexts in this moderation hypothesis.

Also, as limited studies have focused on the association among stressors and the existence of potential moderators, it is difficult to compare findings from the current study to prior empirical works. For example, Craig and Smith (2014) hypothesized peer support as the moderator but found no interaction between victimization and peer support predicting school performance. Besides testing different outcomes among SMY, there are also methodological differences between the current study and Craig and Smith's study as two studies applied different operationalization approach in measuring peer support, which increases the possibility

that each instrument actually measures different aspects of peer support. Specifically, the current study tried to capture peer support to the sexual minority community in general while Craig and Smith measured the support that is specific to victimization, which highlights an additional contribution of the current study. Moreover, the sample in the Craig and Smith's studies consisted of much younger participants from the age of 14 to 17, multiple racial/ethnic minority groups, and predominantly female compared to the sample in the current study with older but still considered as youth population, pan-ethnic group, and predominantly male participants.

Perceived school adult support was not associated with internalized homonegativity nor interacted with sexual orientation-based victimization among Latinx SMY. Results conflict with prior studies suggesting the importance of school adult support (Dessel et al., 2016; Price et al., 2019). However, Darwich and colleagues (2012) found that school adult support only buffered the adverse impact of sexual orientation-based victimization among bisexual and questioning male youth but not among other SMY. Given that participants in the current study are predominantly gay and lesbian (90%), it is reasonable to further examine the buffering effect of school adult support across sexual minority identities.

Differences in Sexual Orientation-Based Victimization by Family Support and School Level

The moderating effect of development was only detected in the family context where the findings showed that family support exacerbated the adverse impact of sexual orientation-based victimization on internalized homonegativity among high school Latinx SMY but mitigated such impact of victimization among college Latinx SMY. Specifically, the moderating role of family support among Latinx SMY in high school was contradictory to the minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003). As proposed in the previous section, the moderating roles of social support from different social contexts may not independently or globally contribute to preventing

internalization of homophobic experience but intertwined with each other forming a rather complex effect on the associations between sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity.

However, in college, Latinx SMY might benefit from perceiving a more supportive family context such that they were less likely to internalize homophobic experience regardless of social support perceived from other social contexts such as peer, school adult, etc. The protective role of family is salient among Latinx youth across lifespan (Nicasio, et al., 2018), whereas young adults rely less on others (e.g., peers and school adults) with whom Latinx SMY are less likely to build up intimate relationships as they develop more autonomy in transition to young adulthood (Erickson, 1968; Peter, et al., 2014). As a result, the complexity in the intertwined effect of different types of social support may become simplified as Latinx SMY enter young adulthood such that only family support plays a unique role in buffering adverse contribution of sexual orientation-based victimization on internalized homonegativity. Similar to this explanation, Raffaelli and colleagues (2013) found that even though each type social support including family, peer, and significant partner, all showed similar patterns regarding their protective effects against stressors among Mexican college students, only family support remained significant when different types of social support were taken into consideration altogether. Such a proposal is also supported by the findings in the current study that no three-way interaction was found when testing peer support or school adult support as moderators across development.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study used cross-sectional data and therefore I can only make correlational conclusions and am unable to articulate the directionality of any associations. Even though the

minority stress model proposed that individuals build proximal minority stressors through distal minority stressors, it is necessary to design a longitudinal study in the future to examine the prospective associations between sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity. For example, it may be the case that SMY are more likely to perceive victimization and other discriminative experience to be related to sexuality if they already internalized a high level of homonegativity. Second, participants in the current study were recruited via GLSEN's social media pages, which might bring in sampling bias to the analysis. That is, it is possible that participants perceiving their social contexts as supportive seek information and resources more actively on social media outlets compared to those perceiving their social contexts as not supportive. In fact, the distribution of perceived social support in family, peer, and school adult context were all negatively skewed, indicating participants perceived their social contexts as very supportive.

Third, there are few notable and counterintuitive findings that need to be clarified in future studies. That is, associations between sexual orientation-based victimization and internalized homonegativity were stronger for Latinx SMY with higher perceived peer support and for high school Latinx SMY with higher perceived family support. The current study proposed that operationalization of perceived support in each social context should not be considered individually or globally especially during adolescence among Latinx SMY (e.g., high school-aged SMY), but handled as a rather complex concept such that perceived support from difference sources intertwined with each other and perceived support in one specific social context cannot be explained without considerations of other social contexts. More qualitative research may help to unpack counterintuitive findings. Finally, it is also important to further examine the minority stress theory by exploring interactions between protective factors and each

type of stressors (distal and proximal) that together contribute to health-related outcomes in the sexual minority individual. For example, the current study uncovered the interaction between a distal stressor and protective factors on a proximal stressor among Latinx SMY populations. Further examination will be required to test alternative moderating effects of protective factors in the minority stress model, such as whether protective factors also buffer the adverse effect of proximal stressors on health-related outcomes?

Conclusion

In sum, the above findings establish empirical evidence supporting positive associations between distal and proximal stressors among Latinx SMY. In particular, sexual orientation-based victimization among Latinx SMY was positively associated with internalized homonegativity, and such associations remained salient across social contexts and across development from adolescence through young adulthood. Further, findings also highlighted the complexity in the moderating effect of social support and potential variations across development in the associations between distal and proximal stressors. Importantly, the current study calls on the importance of exploring interlocking connections among different sources of social support as well as the complex role of social support on adverse effects of distal stressors across development in future studies.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
M			4.02	4.24	3.87	1.52	3.65
SD			1.11	.86	.98	.63	1.02
1. Family support	3.68	1.39		.02	**.39****	**.60****	**.63****
2. Peer support	4.22	0.89	.16		.12	-.06	-.05
3. School adult support	3.66	1.08	.09	**.45****		**.30****	**.30****
4. Victimization	1.37	0.79	**.41****	-.12	-.08		**.75****
5. Internalized homonegativity	3.31	1.23	.18	-.13	-.19	**.59****	

Note. M and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Below the diagonal are descriptive statistics and correlations for high school Lainx SMY, above the diagonal are descriptive statistics and correlations for college Latinx SMY * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.

Table 2

Sexual orientation-based victimization means in the item level

Item	*M*	*SD*
1. Other students hit or kick me	1.32	1.03
2. Other students push me around.	1.30	.98
3. Other students say mean things to me or call me names.	1.41	.92
4. Other students spread rumors about me.	1.54	.96
5. Other students try to keep me from being part of activities or in their group.	1.40	.92
6. Other students try to make their friends ignore me or stop talking to me.	1.30	.97

Note. M and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

Table 3

Multiple linear regression analyses of victimization, social support, and school level as predictors of internalized homonegativity

	Main effect			*2-way interaction*		*3-way interaction*	
	B	*SE*	*Beta*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Model 1: Family context							
Victimization	.984***	.11	.61	.97***	.11	**.87*** **	**.14**
FS	.09	.06	.10	.12†	.07	**.01**	**.09**
SL	.45**	.14	.18	.48	.14	**.67*** **	**.16**
Victimization x FS				.05	.09	**.22†**	**.12**
Victimization x SL						**.06**	**.21**
FS x SL						**.26***	**.12**
Victimization x FS x SL						**-.46****	**.17**
Model 2: Peer context							
Victimization	1.07***	.09	.66	**1.04*** **	**.09**	.90 ***	.12
PS	.01	.08	.00	**-.02**	**.08**	-.12	.14
SL	.50***	.14	.20	**.55*** **	**.14**	.55***	.14
Victimization x PS				**.29****	**.10**	.04	.17
Victimization x SL						.33	.18
PS x SL						.09†	.18
Victimization x PS x SL						.39†	.21
Model 3: School adult context							
Victimization	**1.07*** **	**.09**		1.08***	.09	.92***	.13
SS	**-.03**	**.07**		-.03	.07	-.25*	.10
SL	**.51*** **	**.15**		.52***	.15	.55***	.14
Victimization x SS				.11	.10	.12	.14
Victimization x SL						.27	.19
SS x SL						.35**	.13
Victimization x SS x SL						-.02	.19

Note. Models with three-way and two-way interactions also include all main effects. FS represents family support, PS represents peer support, SS represents school adult support, SL represents school level as high school was coded as 0 and college as 1. *b* represents unstandardized regression weights. *se* represents standardized error. Numbers in bold represents statistics in the final model selected for each context. †$p < 0.10$; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

Table 4

Probing three-way interaction among victimization, family support (FS), and school level for internalized homonegativity

Reference group 1	Reference group 2	*B*	*SE*	*95% CI [LL, UL]*
High school	High FS	1.10***	.15	[.80, 1.40]
	Low FS	.73**	.23	[.28, 1.19]
College	High FS	.78**	.21	[.36, 1.20]
	Low FS	1.21***	.20	[.82, 1.60]

Note. b represents unstandardized regression weights. *se* represents standardized error. LL and UL indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively. *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 5

Probing two-way interaction between victimization and peer support (PS) for internalized homonegativity

Reference group	*B*	*SE*	*95% CI [LL, UL]*
High PS	1.27***	.11	[1.04, 1.48]
Low PS	.84***	.13	[.59, 1.09]

Note. b represents unstandardized regression weights. *se* represents standardized error. LL and UL indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively. *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Figure 1

Simplified minority stress model by Meyer (2003)

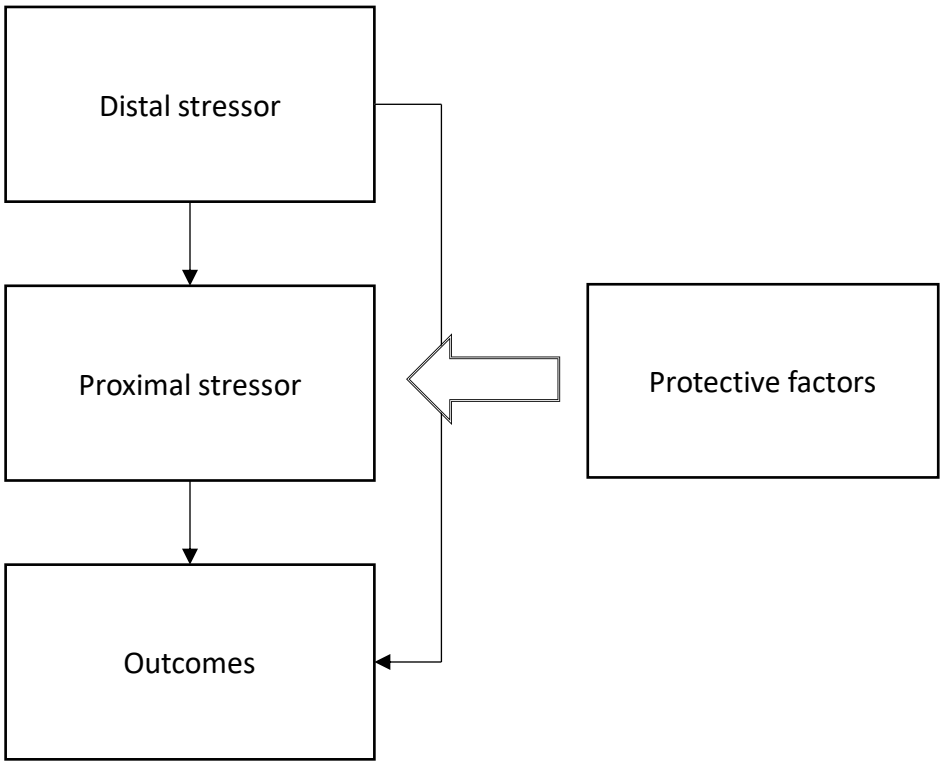


Figure 2

Potential moderating effect of social support in the minority stress model

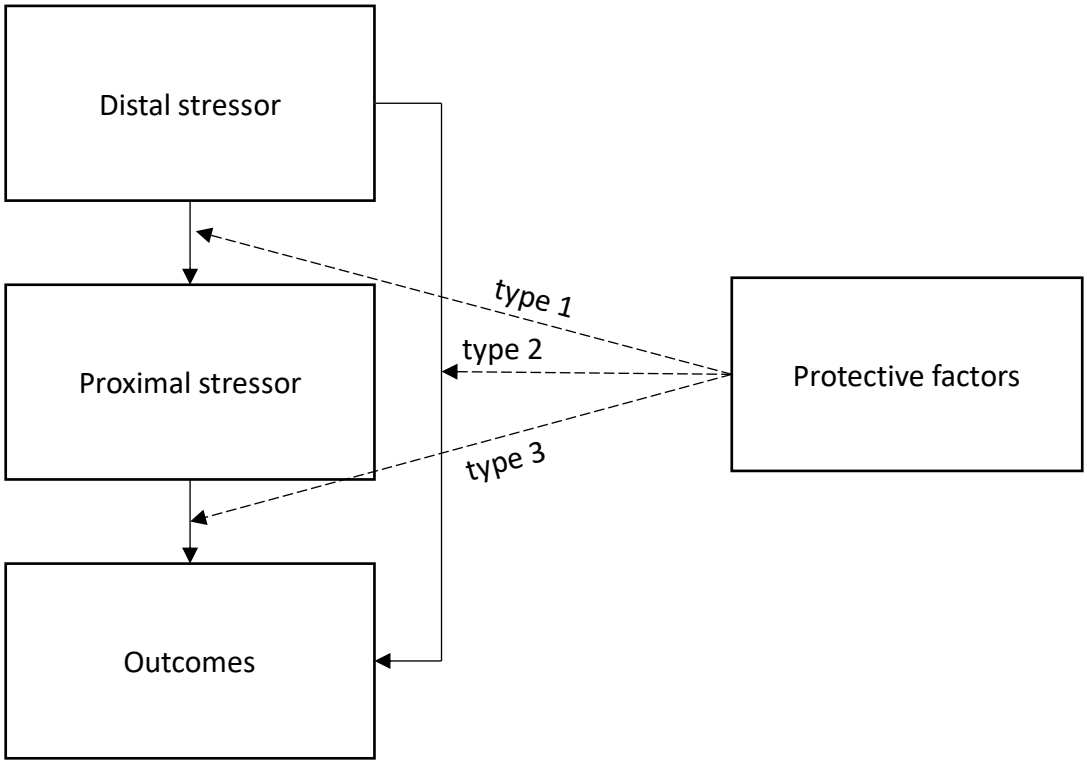


Figure 3

The three-way interaction between victimization, family support, and school level predicting internalized homonegativity

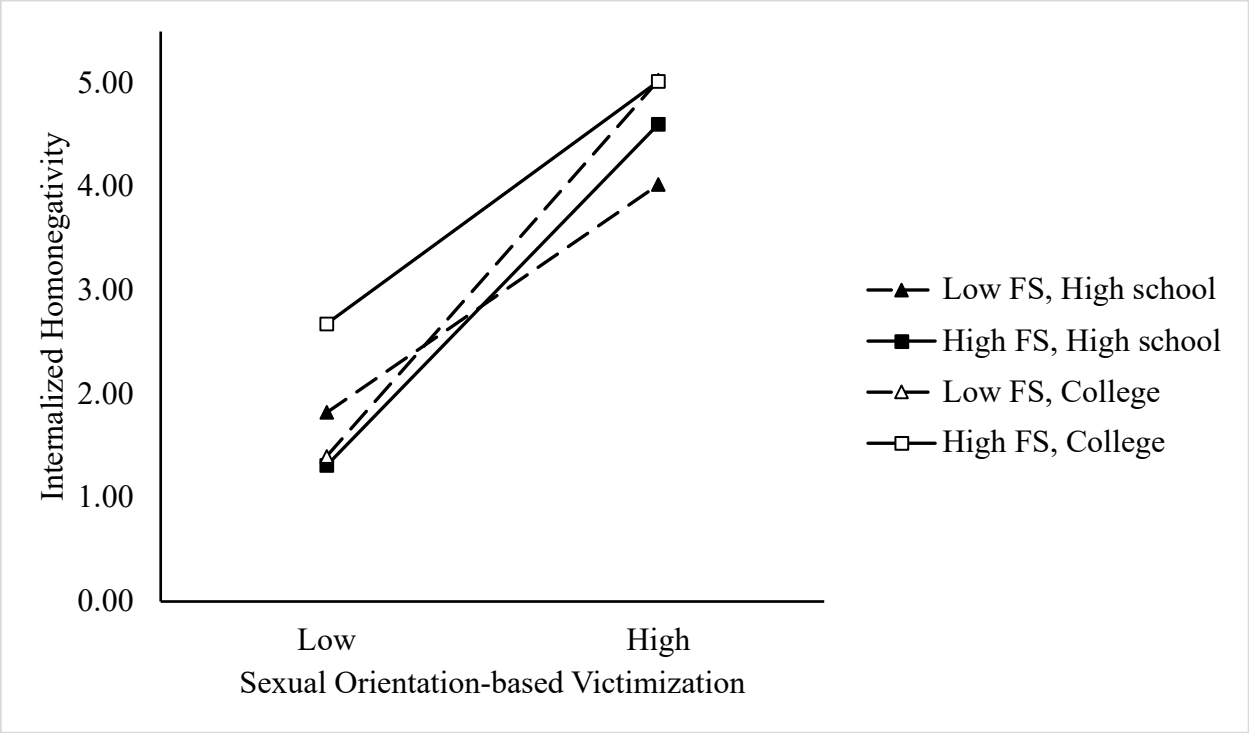
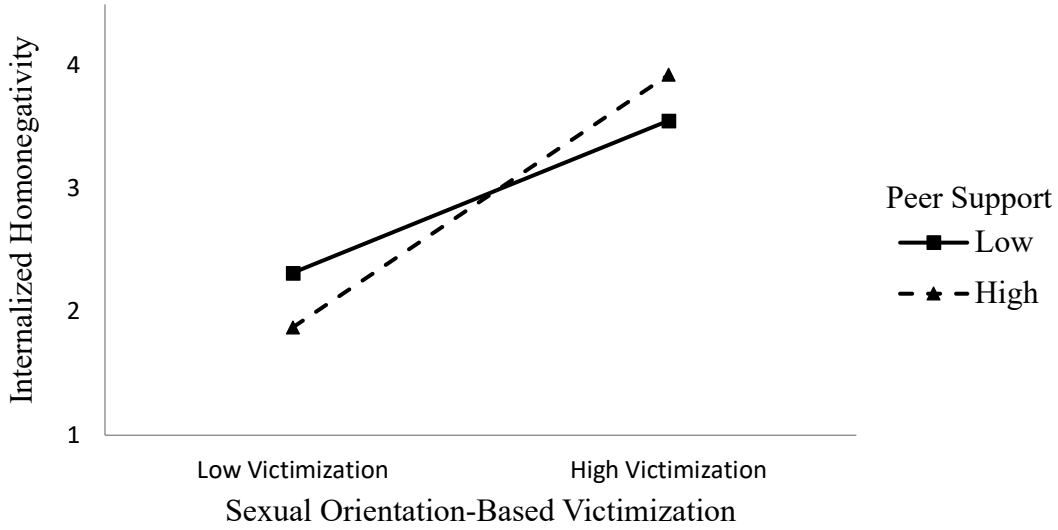


Figure 4

The two-way interaction between victimization and peer support predicting internalized homonegativity



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